

ROYAL INTRODUCTIONS

Kings of the Past Who Point Us to the True King

UZZIAH: Reaching Too High

(2 Kings 15:1-7; 2 Chronicles 26)

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Not many of us were around when FDR died early in his fourth term as President. He had been in office for over 12 years through some of the most turbulent years in our nation's history. Having served for so many years, imagine the shock and insecurity our nation sensed with his sudden absence. Now, imagine that, instead of 12 years, he had been in office for over 50 years. That is what we have with Uzziah. Only one king reigned longer than he did. It is hard for us to conceive of having the same leader for that long. That is probably why Isaiah went to the Temple upon the death of Uzziah (Isaiah 6:1). He had to pray about this new day.

For all of the years that Uzziah reigned, he only gets one chapter in Chronicles to talk about his life. Sadly, what the chronicler had to say was not complimentary. As with so many of the kings, Uzziah started well. We see this in **2 Chronicles 26:5**, **"He set himself to seek God in the days of Zechariah, who instructed him in the fear of God, and as long as he sought the LORD, God made him prosper."** This would be a wonderful end to a king's story, but alas, the writer goes on to describe an incredible rise to fame and glory, and then an equally drastic fall where Uzziah basically loses everything.

Let's look at the story. **2 Chronicles 26:5** says that Uzziah prospered **"as long as he sought the LORD"**. This was most of his life. From vs.6 to vs.15 the writer of Chronicles describes Uzziah's strength and fame in detail. His army was impressive, composed of over 300,000 war ready soldiers that were very well equipped. He built fortress cities and towers for defense, and he was inventive in developing new weapons. In **vs.14-15** we are told that he built **"machines."** We don't know exactly what those were, but they were put on the towers and were able to **"shoot arrows and great stones."** These were apparently impressive, because the strength of his army caused his fame to be renowned.

Uzziah attained great heights in fame and strength, but it didn't last. He prospered as long as he sought the LORD. Unfortunately, later in his life a shift took place. The central verse in this whole story is **vs.16**, **"But when he was strong, he grew proud, to his destruction."** He sought the LORD when the LORD was needed, when he was weak and vulnerable. When he grew strong and secure, and when he was no longer vulnerable, the seeking stopped. Uzziah became proud. He forgot that it was the LORD that prospered him. It was the LORD who helped him defeat his enemies. Instead, he found within himself all that he needed. That pride led him to do something that was highly inappropriate, to put it lightly. He went into the Temple to burn incense. What was the big deal about this?

We have to understand how God worked in the midst of His people. In the administration of governing the people of God, there were what we would call three offices, three primary roles that leaders fulfilled. Those were 1) the king—the individual who ruled over the civil life of the people, including providing security and general civic health; 2) the prophet—those who spoke directly from God to the people, bringing correction and encouragement; and 3) the priest—those who acted as intermediaries between God and the people, interceding for the people in relation to their sins and atonement. These three offices are almost always held separately. The same person, with few exceptions, did not fulfill more than one role. David would be an exception in that as king he also played the role of prophet in the writing of the Psalms. There was never to be one individual who had a monopoly on the oversight of God's people. That was reserved for God Himself. Such a one would be accountable, not to other prophets but only to himself, and he would act as his own priest, atoning for his own sins. What Uzziah did was to see himself as so great and strong, that he attempted to become like God. He also saw himself as acceptable enough that he could enter into the holy places. What he is doing here is very brazen. The priests confronted him on this, reminding him that only the priests could burn incense, which was part of the regular priestly function within the inner parts of the Temple, those places that only the priests could enter. Uzziah was not ordained to do that. He was not properly cleansed to do that. He was forbidden from entering that part of the Temple.

If Uzziah had stopped right here and listened to the priests, things would have turned out very differently. But, pride does not allow us to hear what we need to hear. Instead of listening, he got angry. As he responded in self-defense instead of repentance, the LORD inflicted him with leprosy, a condition that made him very obviously unclean, and therefore barred from the Temple area and also the community of God's people. Where before he thought himself to be clean enough to burn incense, the LORD made him so obviously unclean that he had to live out the last years of his life in isolation, never being able to enter the presence of the LORD again. It was a harsh judgment that unfortunately his pride demanded.

What we learn here is that worldly success is not what it is cracked up to be. We long for success and security. We pray for God to bless our efforts to gain material wealth, or to keep from losing our material wealth. And, when we fail to achieve those goals, we believe that we are not blessed. We are failures. Something is wrong. What we fail to realize that, when we long for and pray for wealth, security, and success, we might be asking for a deadly snake instead of a friend. When we are in want, we are far more likely to find the humility that keeps us dependent, and when those wants are fully satisfied, we are far more likely to think we somehow earned or deserved it. Hardship is probably one of greatest gifts our Heavenly Father can give to us, and unfortunately it is one that we esteem very little. Worldly success, on the other hand, is very highly esteemed by us almost more than anything else, while our Heavenly Father gives it very little value. Why would I want something that will be to my destruction, instead of being thankful for the Father's protection from such dangers?

It is never up to us to gain prosperity. It is always the gift of a gracious Father, when He sees that it will be a good gift. We are always the beneficiaries of God's gracious gifts. He never gives them to us because we earn them or deserve them. We receive them out of His mercy alone. In ourselves, we are helpless dependents, and so often it is our struggles that keeps us in that blessed place.

There will come a King who will not only rule over His people with justice and righteousness, but He will also be the Prophet in the likeness of Moses who will communicate directly the Word of God, and He will be the Great High Priest who will not need to offer sacrifices for Himself. Instead, He will offer Himself as the Supreme sacrifice for His people's prosperity. Uzziah was in some ways the anti-king, in that he basically wanted to be as God Himself. Yet, the Only Begotten Son would come and be the True Prophet, Priest, and King. Out of love for His people He would become sin, making Him more unclean than leprosy can accomplish. He would take our uncleanness upon Himself that we might become the glorious, righteous, and beautiful bride, and as His beloved bride, we would be forever welcome in His holy presence.